

MSSSC NEWS

Colorectal cancer demographics changing

New data released this month by the American Cancer Society signal a major shift in the demographics of colorectal cancer – a shift MSSSC members have observed.

From 2013 to 2022, overall colorectal cancer rates dropped by about 1% each year, largely due to declines in older adults. But in those younger than 50, rates increased by 2.9% per year during that same period.

“I’ve definitely seen a huge increase in both cancerous and precancerous colon tumors in young people,” said Bassem Matta, MD, with Kansas Gastroenterology. “I have several young, healthy patients whom I’ve diagnosed and treated for either large precancerous colonic tumors or colon cancer.”



Dr. Matta

Lindsay Strader, DO, a colon and rectal surgeon with Wichita Surgical Specialists, has also seen an increase in younger patients. “We’re seeing more cases in patients in their 40s and 30s, and even younger,” she said.



Dr. Strader

These younger patients have led to new challenges, Strader said, “including treating colorectal cancer patients who are currently pregnant or have real concerns about future fertility.”

Though CRC incidence has risen in every generation born after the 1950s, the reasons are unclear. Genetics is a factor. Current research also focuses on inflammation associated with diet, microplastics and antibiotics. Matta thinks people eating more processed foods with less fiber is contributing to the problem.

A key to reducing deaths is early screening (current guidelines are age 45 for those with an average risk and earlier for those with a family history). These screenings can both prevent cancer by finding precancers that are easily removed and by finding cancer early, before symptoms develop.

Nathan Tofteland, MD, is program director for the Gastroenterology Fellowship at KU School of Medicine-Wichita, which has published two abstracts analyzing data for patients under age 45 who underwent colonoscopies. He elected to undergo his first colonoscopy for cancer screening before he turned 45 due to both parents having had adenomatous colon polyps before age 60. He had two adenomas removed, one of which met the criteria for advanced adenoma.



Dr. Tofteland

“Had I waited until age 45 years, there would have been substantial risk that that advanced adenoma may have already progressed to colon cancer,” he said.

However, that is not the case for most younger patients. About 3 out of 4 adults younger than 50 with CRC are diagnosed when the disease is at an advanced stage, according to the American Cancer Society.

“It’s a shame that in 2026 people are not getting screened as early as they should or some younger patients are ignoring symptoms until it’s too late,” Matta said. “Nowadays, we have the technology and expertise to endoscopically resect all types of precancerous and early cancer tumors without even the need for surgery.”

Strader urged anyone with rectal bleeding, persistent change in bowel habits, anemia or unexplained weight loss to be evaluated by a physician, regardless of age.

“Earlier detection of colon cancer improves survival,” she said. “It’s important for both patients and physicians to note that colorectal cancer is no longer a disease exclusive to older adults.”

KUSM-W society honors Sweet



KUSM-Wichita named a new medical academic society after MSSC member Donna Sweet, MD. The Sweet Society will be open to the first-year class of medical students in 2027, after the school expands into the new downtown Wichita Biomedical Campus.

Sweet has been a faculty member at KUSM-W for almost 45 years. In addition to running a general internal medicine practice, she directs an HIV program that cares for about 1,500 patients. She also is a national and international speaker and expert in the research, education and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

KUSM-W Dean Laura Tatpati, MD, said the new society “stands as a tribute to Dr. Sweet’s enduring legacy, excellence in education, leadership through service, and the belief that medicine is best when it is compassionate, courageous and community-centered.”

MSSC at WSU on April 30

Don’t miss MSSC’s next membership meeting on April 30. Wichita State University leaders will discuss their plans to create a National Institute of Health Solutions and Innovation and how MSSC members might be involved. There also will be elections for next year’s MSSC board.

► MSSC membership meeting

WHEN: Thursday, April 30, 6-8 p.m.

WHERE: WSU Marcus Welcome Center, E 21st St N and Mike Oatman Drive

COST: Free to MSSC members and spouses. Meal and drinks provided.

RSVP: Email denisephillips@med-soc.org or call (316) 683-7558.

March
2026

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D.C. trip showed value of engagement, patience



CHADY SARRAF, MD
March President's Message

MSSC members Drs. Estephan Zayat, Katie Rosell, and I, along with MSSC Executive Director Phillip Brownlee, were in Washington, D.C., last month to visit members of the Kansas congressional delegation. The trip reinforced to me the importance of physician engagement, but also how advocacy can be a slow and frustrating process.

According to a recent MSSC survey, the three most pressing challenges facing our members are physician reimbursement rates, prior authorization requirements and workforce staffing shortages. During our advocacy meetings, our group discussed these issues with Kansas Sens. Jerry Moran and Roger Marshall, Reps. Sharice Davids and Derek Schmidt, and with a policy adviser for Rep. Ron Estes.

Prior authorization

We spent a lot of time with Sen. Marshall discussing prior-authorization reform. He is the lead sponsor of the Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act (S. 1816/H.R. 3514), which would streamline and modernize the prior-authorization process for Medicare Advantage plans.

Sen. Marshall has championed the bill for years, and it has wide bipartisan support. The Senate bill has 66 co-sponsors, and the House version has 259 co-sponsors. All five other members of the Kansas delegation are co-sponsors. Despite the majority support, the bills remain stuck in committee. It appears insurance companies are working behind the scenes to keep the legislation bottled up.

The bill is a case study on how the wheels of government turn slowly — especially if big-money interests are gumming up the gears. But it also shows why it is important that lawmakers hear from physicians to counteract these interests and keep the pressure on lawmakers to act.

Medicare reimbursement

We also discussed how low Medicare reimbursement rates make it increasingly difficult for senior citizens to access needed medical care. Adjusted for inflation, the value of Medicare physician reimbursements has fallen 33% since 2001. As a result, many physicians limit or don't take new Medicare patients. An MSSC survey last year of primary care practices found that, not including safety-net clinics and residency programs, less than 13% of practices were accepting new Medicare patients.

Even when Congress intervenes and improves an increase, it doesn't always lead to higher payments to physicians. For example, Congress approved a 2.5% fee increase for 2026, but then the CMS 2026 fee schedule included "efficiency adjustments" that reduced payments for many procedures by more than 2.5%, wiping out the rate increase for many physicians.

At the urging of MSSC member Jay Gilbaugh, MD, Rep. Estes recently introduced H.R. 7520 to delay implementation of this adjustment until it is more targeted and thoughtful. We encourage the rest of the delegation to support this commonsense legislation.

Staffing costs, availability

Another major concern of MSSC members is staffing. This includes both cost and availability. One specific concern we discussed was the \$100,000 fee the Trump administration wants to impose on H-1B visa applications. Many internationally trained physicians and nurses come to the U.S. on an H-1B visa, and the



new fee could make it difficult to fill critical positions, especially in rural Kansas. The White House indicated physicians would be exempt from the fee, but so far that has not been formalized. Rep. Davids said she signed a letter to the administration urging such an exemption, and we encouraged other delegation members to actively support this.

Noteworthy speakers

The day before our Capitol Hill visits, we attended an AMA advocacy conference that provided a good overview of the political dynamics in Congress. In addition to members of Congress and AMA leaders (including President Bobby Mukkamala, MD, whom we invited to come to Wichita), two of the speakers were particularly noteworthy: Sanjay Gupta, MD, and Mark Cuban.

Gupta, a practicing neurosurgeon, is the chief medical correspondent for CNN. He shared how he began working in media and some of the most notable moments in his reporting. He also discussed the role of physician voices in shaping trust in medicine.

Cuban is a billionaire entrepreneur and co-founder of Cost Plus Drugs, a low-cost online pharmacy that brought more transparency to prescription drug pricing. As is typical for him, Cuban was outspoken and provocative — but also a champion of independent physicians, who he argued were underpaid and overworked. Among his disruptive ideas was making medical school free.

Oh, and the Olympic hockey team

Although unrelated to healthcare, I must mention a fun moment from the trip: Members of the U.S. men's Olympic hockey team were staying in our hotel while in D.C. for the State of the Union Address. It was great running into them in the lobby (medals around their necks), graciously posing for selfies with fans like me.



A long and winding road

Advocacy is often slow and frustrating, but it is essential if physicians want their voices heard where decisions are made. Federal and state lawmakers shape policies that directly affect how we practice medicine and how our patients access care. When we engage — through meetings, testimony, or organizations like MSSC and the Kansas Medical Society — we bring frontline insight that policymakers cannot get from reports or insurance lobbyists.

I also believe our next step should be empowering our patients to share their own struggles accessing care. Their voices and real-life experiences can be powerful in helping legislators understand the human impact of the policies they shape.

In Brief ▶▶▶

New and noteworthy

988 calls increasing

A report released by the state's 988 Coordinating Council showed that calls and texts to the state's suicide and crisis hotline have increased each year since the service was implemented in July 2022.

The number of routed calls climbed from 2,751 in January 2025 to as high as 3,796 in October 2025. In 2024, the volume ranged from 2,103 to a monthly high of 3,265.

The number of texts and chats routed also increased: from 1,649 in January 2025 to 2,262 in November. In 2024, the total increased from 954 to a monthly high of 1,638.

The in-state answer rate remained near or above the state goal of 90% after March 2025, after starting the year below the goal, according to the report.

Sedgwick County had 27,863 calls to local crisis lines and 3,343 calls to the 988 lifeline between January and September 2025.

Job program seeks support



Representatives with the Greater Wichita YMCA spoke to the MSSC Board of Directors last month about the YMCA's Job Prep program for disadvantaged teenagers. The YMCA is seeking medical practices willing to host a summer intern and donors willing to sponsor a student for \$2,500 a year.

The program starts with classes that teach students skills such as resume writing, job interviewing and money management. Those who successfully complete the training are placed in paid summer internships in Wichita and Newton businesses.

MSSC member Rebecca Reddy, MD, has had Job Prep interns at Redbud Pediatrics. She has been impressed with the students and believes the program can help address the shortage of healthcare workers.

For more information about hosting an intern or sponsoring a student, contact Natania Jetter at 316-776-8179 or jobprep@ymcawichita.org or visit ymcawichita.org and click on the "programs" tab.

Who inspires you?

MSSC is filming short videos (15-20 seconds) in which an MSSC member names one of the many local physicians who inspires them.

"The goal is to express appreciation, recognize inspiring physicians and strengthen bonds within MSSC," said MSSC Executive Director Phillip Brownlee.

If you have a physician you would like to recognize, email denisephillips@med-soc.org.

MPR acquires KC company

MSSC subsidiary Medical Provider Resources has acquired Credentialing Experts, a Kansas City firm specializing in provider credentialing services. The acquisition strengthens MPR's regional footprint and enhances its ability to support healthcare organizations navigating increasing regulatory and operational complexity.



"MPR is excited to collaborate with Credentialing Experts and expand our reach to offer support for our clients and providers, old and new, in an ever-changing healthcare landscape," said MPR Board President Alexandra Melocco, MD.

MSSC Executive Director Phillip Brownlee added: "MPR is the state leader in medical credentialing and provider-enrollment services. This acquisition enables it to serve even more physicians and medical practices in the Kansas City area and Missouri."

Public trusts docs most

A new survey showed that U.S. adults trust their doctors and medical associations more than federal health agencies to share trustworthy public health information. Americans trust their own primary care providers (86%), the American Heart Association (82%), the American Academy of Pediatrics (77%) and the American Medical Association (73%), according to the Annenberg Public Policy Center. They are less likely to trust the CDC (60%), the NIH (62%) and the FDA (62%). Only 5% of Americans were "very confident" that agency leaders are providing the public with trustworthy information.

Creating healthy workplaces

The Health & Wellness Coalition of Wichita, an affiliated program of MSSC, is holding its 2026 Working Well Conference from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 10 at the Drury Plaza Hotel Broadview, 400 W. Douglas. The conference brings together top health promotion experts to focus on what works in worksite wellness. Speakers this year include Corey Martin, MD, a family physician in Minnesota who will explore how small, intentional shifts can improve health, increase resilience and deepen a sense of meaning. Visit hwcwichita.org to learn more and register.

Farhas, Grene impactful

Two key names in MSSC history were mentioned among the Wichita Business Journal's 40 Most Impactful Wichitans: the Farhas and Bruce Grene, MD. Brothers S. Jim Farha, MD, and George Farha, MD, co-founded what became Wichita Surgical Specialists, as their family also shaped Wichita through KUSM-W, construction and philanthropy.

Grene founded Grene Vision Group, pioneered laser surgical techniques and helped establish the Wichita Eye Foundation and Eye Bank.

William Voloch, Wesley Healthcare's CEO since 2015, also made the list. All of the honored individuals and families will be profiled in the March 27 edition of the Business Journal, marking the newspaper's 40th anniversary.

Physician ENGAGEMENT

MSSC members traveled to Washington, D.C., last month. They spoke with members of the Kansas congressional delegation about prior authorization, Medicare reimbursement rates and staffing cost.



▲ ESTEPHAN ZAYAT, MD, KATIE ROSELL, MD, AND CHADY SARRAF, MD



Sen. Jerry Moran and Estephan Zayat, MD



Drs. Sarraf, Rosell and Zayat with AMA President Bobby Mukkamala, MD



Sen. Roger Marshall and Chady Sarraf, MD



Drs. Zayat, Rosell and Sarraf with Rep. Derek Schmidt

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In Brief ▶▶▶

New and noteworthy

Docs among 40 honorees



DR. BERTSCHY

MSSC members **Taylor Bertschy, DO**, and **Gebran Khneizer, MD**, are among the Wichita Business Journal's 40 Under 40 honorees for 2026, chosen for their achievements and contributions to their organizations and community. Bertschy is an obstetrics hospitalist at Wesley Healthcare. Khneizer practices with Kansas Gastroenterology. Those on the 2026 list will be honored at a May 7 dinner at the Wichita Marriott.



DR. KHNEIZER

Beard, Hett recognized



DR. BEARD

MSSC member **Sheryl Beard, MD**, and retired member **Edward Hett, MD**, each received the Physician Volunteerism Award at the JayDoc Community Clinic's fundraising banquet last month.



DR. HETT

MSSC helped sponsor the event, which raised over \$44,000 for the clinic's diabetes care initiatives.

Beard also was a guest speaker.

Cole part of mission



DR. COLE

MSSC member **Roy Cole, DDS, MD**, of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Associates was among 93 dentists who volunteered at the recent Kansas Mission of Mercy free dental clinic in Manhattan. Cole performed more

than 100 extractions as part of the two-day clinic, which served more than 600 patients.

Mitnaul spoke at USD 259



DR. MITNAUL

MSSC member and child and adolescent psychiatrist **Larry Mitnaul, MD**, spoke last month to more than 300 Wichita Public Schools counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists about school-based support, collaboration and caring for the whole child.

ROSTER UPDATE

Keep your 2026 roster current with this information. Key: [BC] Board Certified [F] Accredited Fellowship [R] Residency [AT] Additional Training [F*] Unaccredited Fellowship

NEW MEMBER



Neelakanta Atkuri, MD

[BC] Internal Medicine
[R] Pediatrics
Sound Physicians
OFF: 316-268-6976
FAX: 316-291-4396
929 N St Francis, 67214
NPI: 1902213424

Medical education obtained at Alluri Sitarama Raju Academy of Medical Sciences, Eluru, India 9/2004-5/2010. Residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, MI 7/2014-6/2018.

REINSTATED TO ACTIVE



Delane H. Phillips, MD

[BC] Family Medicine
GraceMed Health Clinic
OFF: 316-866-2000
FAX: 316-866-2084
1122 N Topeka, 67214
NPI: 1871888248
Active MSSC member 2022-23.

CHANGES

Kimberly A. Allman, MD

[AT] Obesity Medicine
[AT] Lifestyle Medicine
Plane Healthy Wellness Center - West Campus

Lynn R. Fisher, MD

[AT] Lifestyle Medicine
KUSM-Wichita

Neelu Kalra, MD

One Allergy Asthma & Immunology Center, LLC
FAX: 316-600-8202
www.1allergy.com

RETIRING

Donna M. Bethel, DO – 3/27/26

John F. Evans, MD – 12/31/25

Robert S. McKay, MD – 8/31/25

DROPPING

Stephen D. Clark, MD – Practicing out of area

Mark A. Hilger, MD – Moving out of state

Shuo Li, MD – Moving out of state

In Remembrance

MSSC extends its condolences to the families of Drs. Hawley and Bond.

Raymond G. Hawley, MD

Retired pathologist Raymond G. Hawley, MD, died Feb. 17 in Coffeyville. He was 87.

A Kansas native, Hawley was an MSSC member from 1976-2000, then moved to Coffeyville, where he practiced for 16 years. He earned his medical degree from KU in 1965 and was board certified in Anatomic Pathology & Clinical Pathology and Hematology. Hawley did an internship at Wesley Medical Center and later worked as a pathologist for St. Joseph and St. Francis hospitals.

"With his microscope, he helped many patients in his career with a cancer diagnosis so that they could begin a treatment plan and heal," his family said. Hawley is survived by his sons, Bradford, Anthony and Doug.



DR. HAWLEY

Roger C. Bond, MD

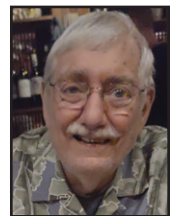
Interventional cardiologist and Heartland Cardiology founding member Roger C. Bond, MD, died March 6. He was 86.

Bond joined MSSC in 1975 and retired in 2014. He served on the MSSC Building & Grounds Committee from 1993-1995 and was board certified in Internal Medicine and Cardiovascular Disease. Bond established coronary angioplasty at Wesley Medical Center in 1980.

Bond earned his medical degree at Marquette University College of Medicine in Milwaukee in 1967.

"Roger had a wonderful sense of humor and a lifelong love of travel, opera and art, as well as college basketball and football," his family said.

Bond is survived by his wife, Vicki Hermes-Bond; daughters, Jennifer, Katie and Amelia; sons, Peter and Stephen; and six grandchildren.



DR. BOND

MSSC NEWS

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